

# *Puññābhisanda Sutta*

## Streams of Merit

The Buddha realized the entire world as it is with his great wisdom and proclaimed to the world how to succeed in the sansaric journey in peace and how to overcome it. The very first advice given by the Buddha is the heavenly path. As much as a disciple of the Buddha listens to what the Buddha said, that disciple's knowledge in the Karmic law gradually develops. And his understanding of karma and re-birth improves. This understanding is named in Buddhism as *Kamassakatā Sammāditthi* (කම්මස්සකතා සම්මාදිට්ඨි). The Buddha's main purpose was to save people from falling into the lower realms like animal realm and ghost realm etc. The possibility to fall dawn is the biggest challenge for everyone. That is why the Buddha advised not to do any evil (*Sabba pāpassa akaranam* = සබ්බපාපස්ස අකරණං) and to practice good deeds in his sermons. It is not only enough to stay away from unwholesome deeds for success in life, but also practice good deeds as much as possible. Buddhism describes three meritorious deeds as the path of heavenly and human realms. They are,

1. Generosity (*Dāna* = දාන)
2. Morality (*Sīla* = සීල)
3. Meditation (*Bhāvanā* = භාවනා)

If someone offers something to others kindly respecting or concerning their qualities and needs, that is generosity. This can be practiced as offering of materials, saving lives and giving Dhamma or advising. When someone practices generosity, his mind is calm, quiet, meritorious and pure. That pure mind brings happiness. Morality means discipline in speech and behavior. The Buddha kindly says when you do something reflect on it again and again whether it is correct and useful. If someone acts with this awareness, he has no mistakes or misbehaviors. Then he has no regrets about his activities. And he can remember his past with a happy mind, so moral life also brings happiness. Meditation means cultivating, developing and purifying one's mind. Meditation decorates our minds with positive thoughts. If someone cultivates his mind using some kinds of meditation techniques, he can keep his mind away from negative thoughts such as anger. By practicing these three meritorious deeds, we can decrease defilements like desire, anger and delusion. When someone purifies his mind from these kinds of negative emotions, his mind is full with happiness. The Buddha says that practicing merits means practicing happiness (*Sukho Puññassa Uccayo* = සුඛෝ පුඤ්ඤස්ස උච්චයෝ). Therefore, the Buddha always encourages us to do merits as much as we can. When mind is pure, quiet and calm, the body also is relaxed and healthy. Then the body is quiet and calm as well as the mind. Someone's proficiency depends on how far he is clever to keep his mind pure, quiet and calm since he is so happy at that moment. According to Buddhism, practicing merits helps people to go to the heavenly realm and come back to the human realm, so having these kinds of blissful life is described as Saggamagga in Buddhism. By the power of doing three meritorious deeds, we can not only achieve good lives hereafter, but we can reduce the power of some previous negative karmic energy and spend a more successful life here also.

If we are well versed (knowledgeable) in what the Buddha taught, we are able to fulfill above three meritorious deeds in several stages. In generosity, first we can feed at least small animals like ants. Then we can develop it gradually like for children, parents, relatives, beggars and virtuous persons. Also, we can practice fearlessness saving others' lives. Finally, the highest generosity is that giving good advice, Dhamma which is the highest gift. If we can correct someone's vision giving dhamma, that is the highest giving. That is why the Buddha says the gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts (*Sabba dānam dhammadānam jināthi*). Further, we are able to practice virtue too in several steps. First, we discipline our speech and behavior for the wellbeing of others as a successful social being. Next, we practice virtue or moral conduct as a meritorious deed. After that we control our speech and behavior to succeed in our concentration meditation. Here we should practice virtue without going extremes as neither there is nor there isn't. Meditation also can be practiced in several purposes and stages. First, meditation is practiced as a physical relaxation like breathing meditation. Next, we can practice meditation as a mental relaxation overcoming anger and stress. Further meditation can be used as a meritorious deed. Also, meditation can be practiced as a concentration meditation technique. Finally, it can be used as a primary technique to succeed in insight meditation. When mind is concentrated, insight meditation can be succeeded reflecting on impermanence according to the Supreme Buddha. This is the highest goal of practicing merits.

The Buddha has often emphasized the significance of doing merits in his sermons. Among them the discourse of *Punnabhisanda* guides us to do the eight highest merits in the mundane level. By learning this discourse we are able to understand eight meritorious streams and increase our spirituality to the maximum level in the mundane level.

#### Streams of Merit (Mundane Level Wholesomeness)

“Bhikkhus, there are these eight streams of merit, streams of the wholesome, nutriment of happiness—heavenly, ripening in happiness, conducive to heaven—that lead to what is wished for, desired, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness. What eight?”

(1) “Here, a noble disciple has gone for refuge to the Buddha. This is the first stream of merit, stream of the wholesome, nutriment of happiness—heavenly, ripening in happiness, conducive to heaven—that leads to what is wished for, desired, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness.

(2) “Again, a noble disciple has gone for refuge to the Dhamma. This is the second stream of merit ... that leads to what is wished for, desired, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness.

(3) “Again, a noble disciple has gone for refuge to the Saṅgha. This is the third stream of merit ... that leads to what is wished for, desired, and agreeable, to one’s welfare and happiness.

Going for refuge to the triple gem; the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are streams of merit.

Mendicants, these five gifts are great, original, long-standing, traditional, and ancient. They are uncorrupted, as they have been since the beginning. They're not being corrupted now nor will they be. Sensible ascetics and brahmins don't look down on them. They appreciate them. What five?

(4). Firstly, a noble disciple gives up killing living creatures. (5) Besides, a noble disciple gives up stealing. (6) Next, a noble disciple gives up sexual misconduct. (7) Also, a noble disciple gives up lying. Furthermore, (8) a noble disciple gives up alcoholic drinks that cause negligence.

By so doing they give to countless sentient beings the gift of freedom from fear, enmity, and ill will. And they themselves also enjoy unlimited freedom from fear, enmity, and ill will. These are gifts which are great offerings, original, long-standing, traditional, and ancient. They are uncorrupted, as they have been since the beginning. They are not being corrupted now nor will they be. Sensible ascetics and brahmins don't look down on them. These are the kinds of overflowing merit.

According to above facts, contemplating on the triple gem and practicing the five precepts are the eight kinds of overflowing merit, overflowing goodness. They nurture happiness and are conducive to heaven, ripening in happiness and leading to heaven. They lead to what is likable, desirable, agreeable, to welfare and happiness.”

Practicing these qualities is the way to gain a blissful life here after as a heavenly path. Also, it helps to make a peaceful place in this world. Buddhism not only explains the heavenly path but the deliverance path too.

After explaining the heavenly path, the Buddha emphasizes the path to overcome sansaric circle completely in his teachings. The second and very important as well as unique path that the Buddha has explained is the enlightenment path. Next, the deliverance path the real way to eradicate all unwholesome roots is being gone to explain.

#### Super Mundane Level Wholesomeness

According to Buddhism the main reason why suffering arises is ignorance (or delusion). Our highest success of life depends on how far we have reduced ignorance. When we experience something through our senses, it arises at the moment with the conditions. Also the experience ceases at the moment without anything remaining. However, we mostly think that after we see or hear something, it remains. This misunderstanding is the main nature of ignorance. At the very beginning of the path of reducing ignorance, we should have a clear knowledge about the dependent origination. Understanding of Buddhism depends on understanding of the Dependent Origination.

He who sees the Dependent Origination sees the Dhamma  
(*Yo paticcasamuppādam passati so dhammam passati*)

He who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha  
(*Yo dhammam passati so mam passati*)

This is the real way to see the Dhamma and the Buddha as well.

Understanding of the dependent origination depends on understanding of the five aggregates. If we have some sort of experience through our senses, it means five aggregates arise together and they cease together at the same moment. It is instant. As a result of the union of the five aggregates, when factors are together, we have experiences through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When factors (or conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. The highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence that "Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not come to (the future) occurrence" (*Ahuvā sambhutam hutvā na bhavissati* - අනුත්වා සම්භූතං හුත්වා න භවිස්සති). If we can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering. Five aggregates are: matter (Rupa-රූප), feelings (*Vedanā*-වේදනා), perception (*Saññā*-සංකල්ප), mental formations (*Sankhāra*-සංකාර) and consciousness (*Viññāna*-විඤ්ඤාණ). When we experience through our senses about the world, these five aggregates arise together. They can't be separated. As the result of arising of these five things, we have an experience. These five aggregates suddenly arise and also cease instantly. When we experience something, they have not only arisen but ceased also. When we experience something through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue or body, these five senses can't get pleasure or pain. As soon as those experiences ceased instantly, we get pleasure or pain in the sense of mind as a past experience. However, we think that we experience in the present because of ignorance. That is why we suffer. If we can understand that these five aggregates arise and cease at the moment with the conditions, we are able to understand its impermanence. According to Buddhism, finally, we have to reflect impermanence on five aggregates, six internal senses and six external objects as well. This is the highest reflection we should practice. Then we know we have nothing to desire or hate. It means we have overcome suffering. As much as we have this understanding and keep reflecting on it in every moment, we have liberated from unsatisfactoriness.

Understanding of the Dependent Origination causes us to understand suffering, and understanding suffering helps to understand the Four Noble Truths which is the main teaching in Buddhism. Arising five aggregates is the first noble truth. Desire, the origin of suffering, which arises because of ignorance, is the second noble truth. Getting rid of suffering is the third noble truth. The path that leads to get rid of suffering is the noble eightfold path which can be separated into three disciplines: virtue, concentration and wisdom.

Virtue, concentration (or tranquility) and wisdom with understanding of dependent origination allow us to get rid of all sufferings and develop real happiness. Virtue means a very high level of discipline in behavior and speech with right vision. With good discipline, if a person focuses his mind on a particular meritorious object such as loving kindness or breathing meditation, then he can concentrate his mind with pure thoughts. With that concentration, one has to reflect on the world reality according to impermanence (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*) and selflessness (*Anatta*) in the correct way. As a result, one can live without desire and hatred because there is no delusion. When he investigates that present moment, he has only the present moment which didn't come from the past and which doesn't go the future from the present. He sees very well the arising and ceasing of all his experiences at the moment. He doesn't catch anything as 'I', 'my' or 'mine'. He has realized everything as impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, egolessness. Then

he can live as a person seeing the truth in a new fresh way. This is the ultimate truth that Buddhism teaches us to be able to get rid of all sufferings.

According to the *Sammaditthi Sutta*, understanding of Karmic Law is one of the ways that leads to achieve the Right Understanding which helps us to go on the path of liberation.

With this understanding we are able to make an unshakable mind. Then nobody can disturb our peace of mind. This understanding helps us to live like a lotus flower among ordinary people without defilements.

Let's live happily without anger among the people those who are angry.

Let's live happily without mental illnesses among the people those who are mentally ill.

Let's live happily without longing in sensual pleasure among those who are seeking sensual pleasures.

This is the highest example that Buddhism points out. The main purpose of everyone should be purifying their mind from greed, anger and delusion completely.

**May the Triple Gem Bless You!**

(තෙරුවන් සරණයි!)

**May All Beings be Well, Happy and Peaceful!**

(සියලු සත්ත්වයෝ සුවපත් වෙත්වා!)

(Tuesday Dhamma Discussion of Los Angeles Buddhist Vihara in Pasadena - 08/13/2019)